

Classes for Cash: Arson Unit Finds Alternative to Traditional Fundraising

Obviously, the more training classes a department holds, the better, but this can be costly. A solution to the high cost of training as well as other budgetary woes was found by the Southeast Foothill Arson Control Team as it began hosting seminars for profit.

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The field of arson investigation is one that is growing more complex every day, thanks to increasing technology. Like the haz mat team, the specialized arson control unit is fast becoming a fire service staple.

These teams may be made up of an eclectic mix of trained arson investigators, fire department members, police detectives or investigators and representatives from insurance firms or utility companies. Once they join the arson team, some of these people will be dealing with situations and abilities that are foreign to them.

For instance, firefighters may suddenly be thrust into the law enforcement field, in that they must learn how to deal with interviewing/interrogation, surveillance and firearms.

On the other hand, police officers may lack training in fire cause and effect and basic fire scene investigation.

How to train and bring together just such a diverse group was the challenge met by the county of Los Angeles in 1976. This was when the Southeast Foothill Arson Control Team (SEFACT) was organized to provide fire and arson investigators with a means to share information, resources and local arson trends. It was a combination of answering this need coupled with a shortage of funds that led SEFACT to discover a new method of fundraising—sharing its training seminars with others.

Just as a little background, the county of Los Angeles has approxi-

mately 55 municipalities and about half as many fire departments. City and county departments cover the largest portions, but there are still at least 30 smaller agencies, ranging in size from the Sierra Madre Volunteer Fire Department, with one station, to the Long Beach Fire Department with 13 stations and nearly 300 personnel.

Within the county there are two arson control organizations that have evolved as a result of the California Fire Chiefs Association: the South Bay Arson Control Team and SEFACT, the latter of which I belong to.

When the Southeast Foothill team was formed, it met monthly, and, as with many organizations, attendance was initially spotty and participation limited. However, the organization gradually but firmly took hold to eventually include 22 member cities.

In 1978, a local insurance company donated a used Ford van to the Chiefs Association, and they in turn gave it to the arson control team to use as a surveillance vehicle. This, coupled with a two-hour training session at each meeting, increased attendance and enhanced participation. However, limited funds made it difficult to properly equip the van. The annual dues of \$25 per city were just not adequate.

In 1982, member Larry Shulman, of Factory Mutual Insurance, negotiated a \$1,500 grant from his employer, and the team now had a new flammable liquids detector in its inventory. Several donated radios were also now on board the van. Still, finances were a problem as there were mechanical difficulties with the van, insurance and routine maintenance needs.

To generate the necessary funds, SEFACT decided to offer its monthly training to other agencies at a nominal fee. The instructors were willing to donate their time, and all that was needed was a location.

It was decided that the training should be on specialized subjects, both fire- and law enforcement-related, and of the type not generally offered. For instance, although the California Fire Academy offers four one-week

courses to certify fire/arson investigators, due to the large scope of the subject, classes touch only briefly on some areas. We decided to concentrate on these subjects.

We assumed, correctly, as it turned out, that there was a market for this training. In February, 1983, Tim May, from the National Fire Academy was flown to Los Angeles to give an excellent two-day class called "Body Language for the Investigator."

Although we lost \$200 on this first class, we felt that making a profit was not the most important consideration (although all subsequent classes did turn a profit). We trained 28 people in a field that is seldom, if ever, offered, in an intensive two-day session.

The charge for this class was \$50, and, what with the flight and accommodations, expenses were high. Fortunately, two of our members sponsored the first class and guaranteed the front money needed for the event.

After this first experience, we received requests and inquiries about whether we offered other classes. Critiques handed out at the first class also indicated that we should offer classes in other areas, but stressed that week days would be better.

In response, SEFACT secured three instructors and locations for a series of specialized classes to round out 1983. In April, a two-day "Vehicle Fire Investigation" class was attended by 36 students. Only \$40 was charged for a classroom/hands-on course that included the controlled burning of eight cars.

A May offering, "Wildland Fire Investigation," was attended by 29 students and included 15 individually-staged fire scenes for students to examine.

In September, Jim Allen, from the California State Fire Marshal's Office, gave an outstanding lecture on "Fire Death Investigation." Students from as far away as San Diego attended this class for a total of 62 fire and police investigators.

By the close of 1983, the Southeast Foothill Arson Control Team had trained almost 200 people and realized a profit of over \$3,000. This money enabled the team to rebuild the surveillance van and make it not only dependable and versatile, but a secure location to house our valuable radio and investigative equipment.

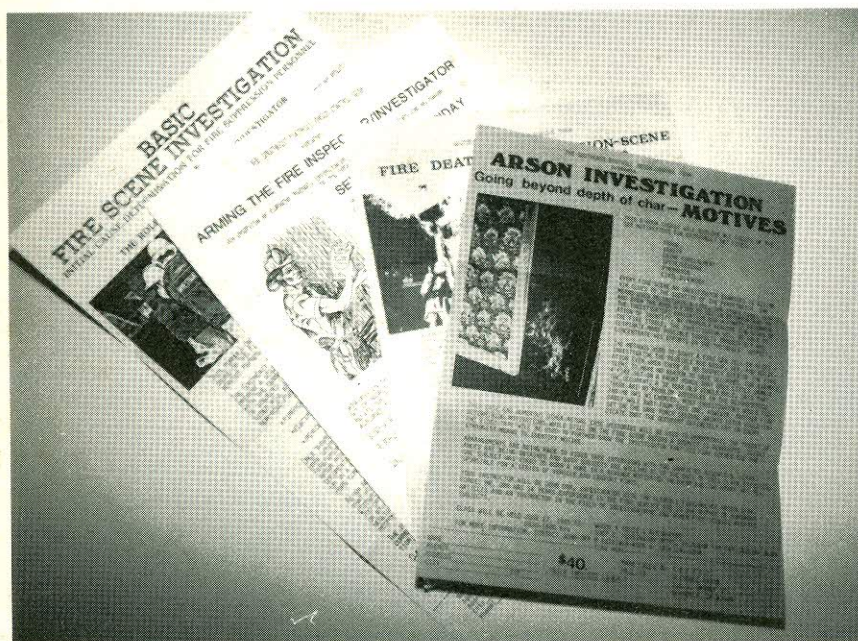
Continuing classes throughout 1984 increased the SEFACT treasury and also created a training budget for team members to use as a resource.

Many of our agencies were unable to fulfill training requests, due to tight budgets, and this extra revenue was now available. A team member had only to request funds through our Education Committee for a class, seminar or State Certification course related to fire/arson investigation, and the requested amount would be provided. We asked only that they make an initial request through their own agencies, and if that was rejected, then submit the request to the team.

At this writing, class registration fees have also dropped from an aver-

critiques to correct obvious problems can produce results.

In 1985, at the request of numerous agencies, the team offered an eight-hour informational seminar on the touchy subject of "Arming the Fire Department Investigator." The need for this was pointed out by many of our team members, as well as other fire department investigators who were assigned law enforcement functions, yet their agencies resisted granting permission to arm them properly. A city attorney, police psychologist, LAFD investigators and a police



age of \$45 to \$50 per student to about \$30. With each class, our mailing list increases. It now numbers over 800 individuals and agencies. Due to increasing attendance, we feel the large mailing list and word of mouth advertising has validated our classes.

Not all of these classes are strictly fire/arson based; they also cater to a general law-enforcement audience. Subjects such as search warrants, link-analysis and investigative sources of information have all been well received, often having an attendance of from 30 to 40 percent police officers/detectives who do not investigate arson.

"Hazardous Materials in School Labs," which elaborated on the serious problem of out-dated and unlabeled toxics/explosives commonly found in public and private schools labs, drew 112 students—a record so far for us.

We believe that all of this is the key. Quality speakers, specialized subjects, a good mailing list and class

rangemaster presented opinions and lent their expertise in support of arming investigators.

Five fire chiefs, 13 fire department representatives, 18 investigators and a variety of interested personnel attended this seminar. As a result, two agencies changed their attitudes towards arming fire department investigators and set up training and qualifications for implementation. Thus, the team assisted in improving the field by providing serious, up-to-date information in a misunderstood area.

Surplus funds are also making it possible for SEFACT to assist financially in the upcoming production of an anti-arson, anonymous witness video tape for the WeTIP organization.

The following guidelines may be helpful for those who want to set up a program similar to the Southeast Football Arson Control Team's. Keep in mind that this formula will work for any organization, as long as the subject matter is timely and not overworked in your area.

FLYERS & ADVERTISING

A printed flyer (8½ x 11 or 8½ x 14 inches) with a photo and headline announcing the class is useful. A local printer or someone within your organization can assist with the design and paste up. The flyer should contain the class title, date, time, location, instructor credentials, topics to be covered and cost of registration.

Our experience has shown that a small tear-off at the bottom of the flyer to be returned is sufficient as registration. This "coupon" should ask the student's name, employer/agency, address and work and/or home phone number. Included on the tear-off should be whom the check should be made out to, address where it should be sent and, again, the cost of the class. Do not put any other important information on the tear-off (such as location, date, time, etc.). Since it will be mailed to the host agency, unless the information is duplicated on the upper portion of the flyer, the student (maybe many students!) will probably end up calling you to find out this lost information.

The last line of the main body of the flyer should be a contact person and phone number to obtain further information. Brief directions and a small map are sometimes helpful, also.

Advertising can be done through state or local organization newsletters, monthly meetings or even by handing out flyers in local college classes appropriate to your subject. (Fire science classes, for example, are frequently made up of actively-employed firefighters, not just 18-year-old students). Begin advertising at least eight weeks prior to the class.

MAILING LIST

Equally, if not *more*, important than the flyer itself, is a good mailing list. Even a hand-scrawled flyer with inadequate information will successfully draw students if it reaches the right people. Mailing lists can be drawn from your own agency (home addresses preferred), organization/union lists (again home addresses preferred) or attendees of past classes. Don't underestimate your coverage!!

You will generally find that only eight to 10 percent of your total mailing will elicit a response. Even less will eventually register. Join other related organizations to gain their directories (mailing lists). Think of it this way: \$15 in organizational dues will be offset if only one member

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"PERSONALIZED"
firefighter car mats
emblazoned with your NAME,
RANK & INITIALS of F.D.



\$39⁹⁵
PR

ADD \$2.50
U.P.S.

Line #1 _____
9 letters max.

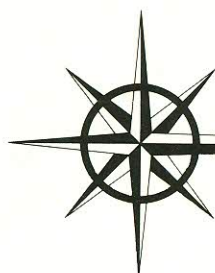
Line #2 _____
11 letters max.

Line #3 _____
9 letters max.

With enclosed check send
Name, Address, State & Zip

Mail checks payable to:
Emblems of Pride
620 Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360
(805) 495-3099
California Residents Add 6%
Sales Tax

For More Information, Circle No. 70



**WORKBOATS
NORTHWEST**

**Fast, Frugal
Fireboats**

**For Communities
That Guard Both
Public & Budget**

Workboats Northwest fire/rescue boats — 45-foot, 30-knot, 5000-gpm "Newell" for Ketchikan and a 25-foot, 32-mph, 1000-gpm craft for Sand Point, Alaska — are now on duty. These fast, nimble, tough, frugal, productive fire/rescue boats were developed specifically for waterfront communities dedicated to guarding both public safety and public money. For more information about these and other WBNW fire, rescue, police, and pollution control boats, contact Bruce Reagan. 121 South River Street, Seattle WA 98108, Tel. (206) 767-4497.



For More Information, Circle No. 71

SEMINAR . . .

Continued from page 25

attends your class.

REGISTRATION FEES

You will find that approximately 60 percent of student registrations will be paid for by an agency/employer. The remainder will be paid by the individuals themselves. Keep this in mind, and don't let one successful class allow you to become greedy. We went through this phase, and found that, as the one-day class fee exceeds \$30, class registration shrinks dramatically.

Of course, charge according to your expenses. Room rental, refreshments, instructor accommodations and equipment rental are typical expenses. If your agency has an accomplished "scrounger," use him. With the right pitch, schools may donate classrooms and local businesses may donate equipment (video cameras, projectors). These forms of assistance can reduce your registration fees and increase your profit.

Don't limit your class size to a number less than 30. At least, allow for this amount initially. There is

nothing worse than having a classroom that holds 30 and 50 students respond. Changing locations to accommodate additional people creates unnecessary phone calls/contacts and is as much of a turn-off as having an over-crowded facility. A good class size for one speaker to handle is 50 to 75 students maximum.

INSTRUCTORS

Use only instructors known for their flair, style and knowledge. even a well-known instructor, knowledgeable in his field, may be a poor speaker and bore the audience. Also, secure slides, table-top demonstrations, videos or movies to assist the speaker. Eight hours of lecture, regardless of the speaker's ability, makes for a somnambulant experience.

Insist that the speaker have an outline, at the very least. Our experience has shown that students want to get their money's worth, not take extensive notes. Have plenty of handouts relating to the subject, whether provided by the speaker or not. If necessary, duplicate the instructor's handout material at your expense. This may loosen the instructor's grip on personal material that he or she may be reluctant to have passed around.

Many speakers carry their knowledge around in their head. Insist that some of it be written down. Employers want their representatives to "bring something home" to teach other employees. After all, they're probably paying.

If the instructor must be paid, charge registration fees accordingly. If your organization realizes a 50 to 60 percent profit, this is normal and acceptable. After all, if you are a municipal-type organization, you are a non-profit, tax-exempt entity.

For a package of material outlining more in-depth information on setting up a fundraising seminar, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

Southeast Foothill Arson Control Team, c/o Glendale Arson, 210 South Orange Street, Glendale, California 91204.



GOT AN INNOVATION?

You are invited to submit your fire service innovation for possible publication. Please include photographs and/or illustrations. Send to: Editor, American Fire Journal, 9072 E. Artesia Blvd., #7, Bellflower, CA 90706-6299.